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# AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

## STUDENT REPORT

AMERICA'S BLACK  
AIR PIONEERS, 1900-1939

MAJOR ROBERT J. JAKEMAN

88-1355

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**REPORT NUMBER** 88-1355

**TITLE** AMERICA'S BLACK AIR PIONEERS, 1900-1939

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Submitted to the faculty in partial fulfillment of  
requirements for graduation.

AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE  
AIR UNIVERSITY  
MAXWELL AFB, AL 36112

UNCLASSIFIED

SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE

## REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

1a. REPORT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION <b>UNCLASSIFIED</b>			1b. RESTRICTIVE MARKINGS		
2a. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION AUTHORITY			3. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY OF REPORT <b>STATEMENT "A"</b> <b>Approved for public release; Distribution is unlimited.</b>		
2b. DECLASSIFICATION/DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE					
4. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S)  88-1355			5. MONITORING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S)		
6a. NAME OF PERFORMING ORGANIZATION  ACSC/EDC		6b. OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable)		7a. NAME OF MONITORING ORGANIZATION	
6c. ADDRESS (City, State and ZIP Code)  Maxwell AFB, AL 36112-5542			7b. ADDRESS (City, State and ZIP Code)		
8a. NAME OF FUNDING/SPONSORING ORGANIZATION		8b. OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable)		9. PROCUREMENT INSTRUMENT IDENTIFICATION NUMBER	
8c. ADDRESS (City, State and ZIP Code)			10. SOURCE OF FUNDING NOS.		
			PROGRAM ELEMENT NO.	PROJECT NO.	TASK NO.
11. TITLE (Include Security Classification) AMERICA'S BLACK AIR PIONEERS, 1900-1939					
12. PERSONAL AUTHOR(S) Jakeman, Robert J., Major, USAFR					
13a. TYPE OF REPORT		13b. TIME COVERED FROM _____ TO _____		14. DATE OF REPORT (Yr., Mo., Day) 1988 April	
				15. PAGE COUNT 44	
16. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTATION					
17. COSATI CODES			18. SUBJECT TERMS (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)		
FIELD	GROUP	SUB. GR.			
19. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number) <p>Throughout the period 1900-1939 black Americans were actively involved in aviation. Until 1927 their participation was sporadic and their numbers limited. Between 1927 and 1936 black Americans' interest in aviation grew and several black pilots achieved notoriety through their aeronautical exploits. After 1936, the number of black Americans involved in aviation expanded and a national black flying association was established. Moreover, black Americans began to question discriminatory practices that restricted their opportunities in the air. Thus when the federal government expanded its involvement in civil and military aviation on the eve of World War II, the stage was set for the emergence of a powerful pressure campaign to prohibit racial discrimination in federally-funded aviation training and open the all-white U.S. Army Air Corps to black Americans.</p>					
20. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY OF ABSTRACT  UNCLASSIFIED/UNLIMITED <input type="checkbox"/> SAME AS RPT. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DTIC USERS <input type="checkbox"/>			21. ABSTRACT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION  UNCLASSIFIED		
22a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUAL  ACSC/EDC Maxwell AFB, AL 36112-5542			22b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (Include Area Code) (205) 293-2867		22c. OFFICE SYMBOL

## PREFACE

This manuscript was prepared as an article for publication, and was written to satisfy ACSC research project requirements. Portions of this project were adapted from the author's forthcoming doctoral dissertation on the origins and establishment of the civilian and military flight training programs set up at Tuskegee, Alabama, after 1939. Subject to clearance, it will be submitted to the Aerospace Historian, the American Aviation Historical Society Journal, or the Journal of Negro History for consideration.

The article analyzes the activities of black Americans in aviation up to 1939. Although only a few black Americans were involved in aviation prior to 1939, reports of their exploits appeared frequently in black newspapers and magazines, especially during the 1930s when one black pilot flew for Ethiopia and several others undertook long-distance publicity flights. By 1939, as the United States began its prewar build-up of civilian and military aviation, several hundred black Americans were actively involved in aviation. The example of these aerial pioneers stimulated the black public's interest in aviation and highlighted the limited opportunities open to blacks who aspired to a career in aviation. Consequently, black Americans launched a pressure campaign to prohibit racial discrimination in federally-sponsored civilian flight training and to force the U.S. Army to admit blacks to the Air Corps, a branch of service then open only to white Americans. As a result of this campaign, hundreds of black youths received civilian pilot training, and in 1941, black Americans were admitted to the Air Corps, albeit on a segregated basis; during World War II, approximately five hundred black pilots flew combat missions in North Africa and Europe. Yet without the efforts and examples of America's black air pioneers, the opportunities which opened up after 1939 might not have been forthcoming. Thus the activities of these early black fliers are an important--but often overlooked--prologue to the opening of military aviation to black Americans, and the desegregation of the United States Air Force after World War II.

Two items in the attached manuscript do not follow the guidelines in the ACSC research project manual. The format for the notes and the bibliography follow the instructions found in Kate L. Turabian, A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, fourth edition.

A number of individuals provided valuable assistance in the preparation of the project, and I gratefully acknowledge their contributions. Professors Allen W. Jones and Wesley P. Newton, of Auburn University, brought important sources to my attention and also commented on portions of the manuscript. One of their colleagues, Professor William F. Trimble, willingly shared the results of his own research on black aviation. Archivists Daniel T. Williams of Tuskegee University and Linda J. Evans of the Chicago Historical Society provided several key documents from collections in their repositories. Above all, I thank my wife and children for their enduring patience and support.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Major Robert J. Jakeman is a U.S. Air Force Reserve officer who served almost nine years on active duty in operational flying assignments. In 1980, he resigned his regular commission and accepted an appointment in the Air Force Reserves. Until 1987, Major Jakeman served as an Individual Mobilization Augmentee (IMA) at the United States Air Force Historical Research Center (USAFHRC), Maxwell AFB, Alabama.

A senior navigator with over 1400 flying hours, Major Jakeman grew up in Tampa, Florida, graduating from the University of South Florida in 1971, with a bachelor of arts in sociology. After graduation, he entered the Air Force to attend Officer Training School at Lackland AFB, Texas, receiving his commission as a second lieutenant in February 1972. Following navigator training at Mather AFB, California, Major Jakeman completed operational training as an F-4 Weapons Systems Officer at Homestead AFB, Florida. Between 1973 and 1980, he served as a combat ready aircrew member, instructor, and flight examiner in F-4 tactical fighters at Clark AB in the Philippines, Osan AB in Korea, and Moody AFB, Georgia. In 1976, he was a distinguished graduate of the Squadron Officer School at Maxwell AFB. In 1980, while stationed at Moody AFB, Major Jakeman completed a master's degree in history at Valdosta State College.

Following his separation from active duty, Major Jakeman continued his graduate studies at Auburn University, Alabama, pursuing a doctorate in American history. After completing his course work in mid-1982, Major Jakeman worked briefly as a civilian archivist at the USAFHRC until he accepted an appointment as assistant archivist at the Auburn University Archives. In late 1985, Major Jakeman resigned his position at Auburn University and, until he returned to active duty in August 1987, devoted his full efforts to researching and writing his doctoral dissertation, a study of the origins and establishment of the World War II-era flight training programs for blacks at Tuskegee, Alabama. He expects to complete the requirements for the doctorate in summer 1988. Major Jakeman was the recipient of the Malcolm MacMillan Research Paper Award (1982), the Milo Howard Scholarship (1986), and the W. C. Bradley Award for Achievement in the Humanities (1987). During academic year 1986-87, he received research fellowships from the Office of Air Force History, Washington, D.C., and the Harry Merriwether Fellowship fund, Auburn University.

In August 1987, Major Jakeman returned to active duty for ten months to attend Air Command and Staff College (ACSC) in residence. On completion of ACSC he plans to return to his duties as an IMA Historical Officer at the USAFHRC and accept a position with the Alabama Department of Archives and History. Major Jakeman resides in Auburn, Alabama, with his wife and two children.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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REPORT NUMBER 88-1355

AUTHOR(S) MAJOR ROBERT J. JAKEMAN, USAFR

TITLE AMERICA'S BLACK AIR PIONEERS, 1900-1939

I. Purpose: To examine the extent and nature of the participation of black Americans in aviation prior to World War II, and to assess the effect of this prewar participation on the campaign for black participation in the Air Corps that emerged in 1939.

II. Background: Prior to 1941, black Americans were not accepted in the U.S. Army Air Corps, the predecessor to today's United States Air Force. In 1941, after an intense pressure campaign on the part of a wide cross-section of the black public, the Air Corps established a segregated pursuit squadron and began training black pilots at Tuskegee, Alabama. By the end of World War II, some 1,000 blacks had been trained as Army pilots and roughly half flew combat in North Africa and Europe. One factor that helped precipitate the campaign for Air Corps participation was the activity of a handful of black American aviators whose exploits were widely reported in black newspapers and magazines throughout the first four decades of the twentieth century.

III. Findings: Throughout the period 1900-1939, there were black Americans actively involved in aviation. Until 1927, their participation was sporadic and their numbers limited. Between 1927 and 1936, black Americans' interest in aviation grew, and several black pilots achieved notoriety through their aeronautical exploits. After 1936, the number of black Americans involved in aviation expanded and a national black flying association was established. Moreover, black Americans began to question discriminatory practices that restricted their opportunities in the air. Thus when the federal government expanded its involvement in civil and military aviation on the eve of World War II, the stage was set for the emergence of a powerful pressure campaign to prohibit racial discrimination in federally-funded aviation training and open the all-white U.S. Army Air Corps to black Americans. In 1939, several black aviators, some of whom were members of the national association of black pilots, played a key role in lobbying Congress to insure that legislation to expand the Air Corps and establish a civilian pilot training program contained provisions relating to the training of blacks. These legislative victories played an important role in fostering the emergence of the campaign for black participation in the Air Corps, which ultimately led to the establishment of segregated air units.

IV. Conclusions: Without the efforts and examples of America's black air pioneers, the opportunities which opened up after 1939 might not have been forthcoming. Thus the activities of these early black fliers are an important--but often overlooked--prologue to the opening of military aviation to black Americans and the desegregation of the United States Air Force after World War II.

## Introduction

In 1938 a Southern black newspaper observed that a growing number of black Americans were becoming "airminded," a contemporary expression which "meant having enthusiasm for airplanes, believing in their potential to better human life, and supporting aviation development."<sup>1</sup> By the 1930s the airplane had come to symbolize the promise of the future, a portent of "a wondrous era of peace and harmony, of culture and prosperity," and many blacks were eager to participate in the new and exciting field of aviation.<sup>2</sup> One indication of rising black interest in aviation can be found in federal statistics on the number of black aviators in the late 1930s. Despite the economic hardships of the Great Depression, which weighed heavily on America's black minority, the Department of Commerce reported almost seventy licensed black pilots or student pilots in August 1936.<sup>3</sup> Less than three years later, in January 1939, the number of blacks who held flying licenses had risen to 125, almost double the 1936 figure.<sup>4</sup>

The exploits of these early black fliers, widely covered in the pages of the black press, fostered the development of an airminded black public and precipitated a powerful campaign prior to World War II aimed at forcing the all-white U.S. Army Air Corps to admit blacks. White Americans of the late 1930s were, however, largely unaware that a small but growing number of the nation's black citizens could fly and were interested in aeronautical matters. Few would have anticipated that in 1939 a struggling black flying club would launch a campaign to break the color line in the nation's air arm and force the War Department to admit blacks to the hitherto lily-white U.S. Army Air Corps. And even fewer would have predicted that the issue would rapidly become something of a cause celebre among black Americans. By the end of 1940 the black press and various civil rights organizations had taken up the cause and were vociferously demanding an end to racial exclusion in the Air Corps. Indeed, Ulysses Lee, author of a monumental study on the role of black Americans in the U.S. Army during World War II, has concluded that the "campaign for admission of Negroes to the Air Corps . . . was the most widespread, persistent, and widely publicized of all the prewar public pressure campaigns affecting the Negro and the Army."<sup>5</sup>

A campaign on the scale described by Lee was required to break the color line in the Air Corps because most whites dismissed the notion that blacks should or could play a role in the air age. Many, no doubt, agreed with the pre-eminent air hero of the era, Charles A. Lindbergh, who heralded aviation as a "tool specially shaped for Western hands, a scientific art which others only copy in a mediocre fashion, another barrier between the teeming millions of Asia and the Grecian inheritance of Europe--one of those priceless possessions which permit the White race to live at all in a pressing sea of Yellow, Black, and Brown."<sup>6</sup> Another experienced white aviator, Kenneth Brown Collings, was more direct; he declared bluntly in the pages of the American Mercury that

"Negroes cannot fly--even the bureau of Air Commerce admits that."<sup>7</sup> As late as 1940, when the Department of Commerce reported 231 black pilots, Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall told a Congressional committee that "there is no such thing as colored aviation at the present time."<sup>8</sup>

The black public, however, knew that Negroes could fly. Since the turn of the century Negroes had been reading in the black press of Afro-American parachutists, aeronautical inventors, barnstormers, long-distance fliers, and aerial soldiers of fortune. The activities of these pioneer black aviators played a crucial role in the emergence of an air-minded black public in the late 1930s, a public which embraced the cause of participation in the Air Corps and by 1941 had forced the War Department to admit blacks and train them as pilots, albeit on a segregated basis. The history of black participation in aviation prior to World War II, and its wide coverage in the black press has not, however, been widely studied.<sup>9</sup> But without an understanding of participation of black Americans in aviation prior to 1939, the emergence of the campaign for admission to the Air Corps cannot be fully understood or appreciated.

The history of black aviation before World War II can be conveniently divided into three major periods. Until 1927, the year Charles Lindbergh made his historic solo flight from New York to Paris, only a scattered handful of black Americans were involved in aviation. With one notable exception, however, their activities were chronicled by black newspapers and magazines. Lindbergh's dramatic flight and the worldwide press coverage it received ushered in the second period of black aviation, 1927-1936. The flight of the Lone Eagle raised the black public's hope that a black air hero would emerge to claim a place in the air age for the race. For several years no likely candidate surfaced, but from 1932 to 1936 the aeronautical achievements of several black fliers captured the imagination of black Americans. In the third phase of black aviation history, the years 1936 to 1939, the focus was no longer on the exploits of a few notable individuals. Instead, the waning years of the 1930s saw a steady expansion in the number of black pilots and the establishment of a national organization of black aviation enthusiasts. These developments culminated in efforts to insure that black Americans were included in two important aviation training initiatives that came before Congress in 1939. The success of black lobbyists in obtaining favorable amendments to this legislation precipitated the emergence of the Air Corps participation campaign and paved the way for the establishment of the 99th Pursuit Squadron, the first black air unit to see combat in World War II.

## Chapter One

### THE EARLY YEARS OF BLACK AVIATION: 1900-1927

Until the 1920s black aviation enthusiasts struggled in relative obscurity, their exploits recorded mostly in the pages of black newspapers and magazines. Before World War I black Americans made balloon ascensions and parachute jumps, submitted patents for aeronautical devices, and learned to

fly. During World War I one black American expatriate joined the French Flying Service and became the first Afro-American to participate in aerial combat. After the war, two black Americans--Bessie Coleman and Hubert Julian--emerged as the dominant figures in black aviation.

The earliest blacks who took to the air made their way skyward not in fixed wing aircraft but in balloons. In 1900, three years before the Wright brothers flew into history at Kitty Hawk, a black woman, Mary Doughtry, reportedly began a career as a parachutist when she leaped from a balloon before a crowd in New Orleans.<sup>10</sup> Six years later an obscure black laborer, identified only as Jackson until he assumed the dashing pseudonym Ajax Montmorency, thrilled crowds attending a Fourth of July celebration in Pittsburgh with a series of balloon ascensions and parachute jumps.<sup>11</sup>

In the decades before World War I, several black inventors designed various types of aircraft, and some received patents for their efforts. One of the earliest was John F. Pickering, of Gonaives, Haiti, who submitted a design for a motorized, steerable balloon to the United States Patent Office in 1899.<sup>12</sup> After the Wrights demonstrated their flying machine at Fort Meyer, Virginia, in late 1908 and the American public began to realize that the problem of heavier-than-air powered flight had been solved, a surge of interest in aviation swept the nation, and at least five blacks designed new types of flying machines. In 1911, 21-year-old Walter Swagerty of Los Angeles claimed to have invented a "heavier than air machine" that earned him the backing of a local millionaire.<sup>13</sup> Three blacks received patents for flying machines in 1912, although they scarcely looked airworthy judging from the design sketches submitted to the Patent Office: James E. Marshall of New York City;<sup>14</sup> Walter G. Madison of Ames, Iowa;<sup>15</sup> and James Smith of Oakland, California.<sup>16</sup> In 1914 a St. Louis black, whose name is variously reported as J. E. Whooter, H. E. Hooter, and John E. McWhorter, patented a strange, wingless contraption consisting of two huge rotating cylinders on either side of a central frame, with conventional horizontal and vertical stabilizers aft.<sup>17</sup> Like many of the flying machines designed and patented by white inventors, it is unlikely that any of these unwieldy devices ever flew, but they demonstrate that the dream of flight captured the imagination of black Americans from the earliest days of aviation.

Besides aeronauts, parachutists, and inventors, there is strong evidence which suggests that at least two blacks were flying airplanes before the outbreak of World War I. One was Lucian Arthur Hayden, a North Carolina native born in the early 1880s, who reportedly toured the South in 1912 giving aerial demonstrations and by 1913 held a French flying license. Hayden, also an inventor, reputedly developed and patented an aeronautical safety device which was accepted and used by the British in World War I. Hayden's invention, described in the press as a device "to prevent airships from falling," was apparently an apparatus to facilitate recovery from a spin.<sup>18</sup> The other was Charles Wesley Peters of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, described by one researcher as the "first black to pilot a heavier-than-air craft and the first black designer and builder of an airplane."<sup>19</sup> Born in 1889, Peters developed an early interest in flying; by the time he was fourteen he had built a number of

kites and gliders, and in 1906 made his first successful glider flight. He subsequently designed and built a powered craft with a forty-foot wing span and an air-cooled automobile engine, making ten flights in the machine before it was destroyed by fire.<sup>20</sup> When news of Peters' achievement reached R. R. Wright, President of Georgia's State Industrial College at Savannah and organizer of the Georgia State Colored Fair held each fall in Macon, he added an aviation day to the schedule of events for the 1911 fair. Wright hoped to feature flights by Peters and ascensions by a black balloonist, and he took out advertisements that announced "For the First Time in the History of Fairs a Colored Man Goes Up in a Air Ship--Everybody Should See It;" Thursday, 9 November was proclaimed "Airship Day. COLORED AVIATOR."<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, a disagreement over money kept Peters from performing at the fair, and Wright hastily secured the services of a white aviator so the crowds would not be disappointed.<sup>22</sup>

Although the United States armed forces trained thousands of military pilots during World War I, none were black. Early in the war there was a glimmer of hope that qualified blacks would be accepted for training as aviators in the United States Army. In the summer of 1917, shortly after the United States entered the war, at least one black newspaper reported that President W. S. Scarborough of Wilberforce University, a black college in Ohio, received a War Department telegram asking him to encourage his "best military students" to apply for Army aviation training.<sup>23</sup> The wording of the telegram, however, suggests that similar requests were sent to all institutions with senior Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) units (Wilberforce was then one of only two black colleges with a senior ROTC unit). That being the case, the telegram to President Scarborough was most likely sent inadvertently as there is no other evidence that the U.S. Army gave any consideration to training blacks as pilots during World War I. Instead, those who applied for duty with the Air Service had their applications returned without action and were told that no black squadrons had been established and none were being organized.<sup>24</sup>

The only blacks who even came close to serving in the air with American forces during World War I were four black officers who entered training as airborne artillery spotters at the Aerial Observers School, Fort Sill, Oklahoma. One, whose light complexion did not immediately identify him as a Negro, remained in the school until two days before his scheduled graduation date. The others, obviously black, were immediately segregated and denied the normal military courtesies due officers until they withdrew in anger and frustration.<sup>25</sup>

One black American did fly as a military pilot during World War I, not with American forces but with the French. Eugene Jacques Bullard, born in Columbus, Georgia, in 1894, left the United States and joined the French Foreign Legion shortly after the war broke out in Europe and earned the Croix de Guerre while serving as an infantryman on the Western front. In November 1916 he transferred to the French Flying Service, thus becoming a member of that unofficial brotherhood of American volunteers who flew with the French, the Lafayette Flying Corps.<sup>26</sup> Bullard completed his training as an enlisted pursuit pilot the following August, and within a week he was flying combat

sorties with a French squadron at the front. By November he was credited with the destruction of one German aircraft and claimed a second, becoming the first black American to destroy an enemy aircraft in aerial combat. Bullard's career as a fighter pilot was cut short several months later after an altercation with a French officer, and he finished the war as an infantryman.<sup>27</sup>

Bullard proved that blacks could fly and fly competently. Unlike Peters or Hayden, his flying skills were well-documented; he had completed the French Air Service course of training and engaged an enemy in aerial combat. James Norman Hall's Lafayette Flying Corps, published immediately after the war, gave a full and favorable account of his participation as an American volunteer flier and, together with the accompanying photograph, left little doubt as to Bullard's complexion. He might have become black America's air hero, but instead he remained in Paris managing a nightclub until Hitler invaded France in 1940, with his exploits virtually unknown to the American public, black or white.<sup>28</sup>

The aviator who, in the early 1930s, would become the symbol of black America's aeronautical dreams was Bessie Coleman. In 1922 Coleman made her debut as an exhibition flier at an air show at Chicago's Checkerboard Field. A native of Texas, Coleman had joined the flood of blacks who migrated north during the World War I era. She settled in Chicago and decided to become an aviatrix. After several flying schools refused to admit her she contacted Robert S. Abbott--owner of the Chicago Defender, one of the leading black papers of the period--who advised her to seek flying lessons in France. After two trips to Europe, she returned to America in 1922 with a license from Federation Aeronautique Internationale, becoming the first black woman from the United States to hold a pilot's license. For four years "Brave Bessie" barnstormed, thrilling large crowds of blacks and whites anxious to see whether a black woman really could fly, as she tried to raise enough money to establish a flying school that would be open to blacks. She died tragically in an air crash on 30 April 1926, while practicing for an air show in Florida and became a martyr to the cause of air progress among blacks.<sup>29</sup>

While Bessie Coleman was learning to fly in Europe, a young black man from the West Indies migrated to the United States by way of Canada, claiming that he learned to fly from the Canadian war ace Billy Bishop. Hubert Julian, the "Black Eagle of Harlem," was a controversial, flamboyant figure given to grandiose schemes and self-appointed titles. By the mid-1920s his audacious behavior and ambitious aviation projects kept him constantly in the news, a foil for white reporters and an embarrassment to the black public.<sup>30</sup>

Julian first came to the attention of American blacks in 1921, as "Dr. H. Julian, a Negro student at McGill University, Montreal, Canada," whose patented air safety device "brought an offer of \$300,000 from the Curtis [sic] Aeroplane Company for patent rights and one for \$150,000 from the Gerni Aeroplane Company of Montreal."<sup>31</sup> Julian hoped his invention would provide a "method of lowering a disabled plane gently to the ground by means of an extra large parachute and a system of rotating blades. . . ."<sup>32</sup> The following year he had settled in New York City and affiliated himself with Marcus Garvey, another controversial West

Indian who founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), came to the United States in 1916, and captured the imagination of the black masses with his rhetoric of black pride and his grandiose schemes of resettling American blacks in Liberia.<sup>33</sup> In August 1922 the Negro World announced that Julian would head the Aeronautical Department of the UNIA, which came to be known as the "Black Eagle Flying Corps."<sup>34</sup>

Thus Julian launched the American phase of his long and checkered career as a flier, maintaining a ubiquitous presence in black aviation until the 1940s, and the only black flier active in both the pre- and post-Lindbergh eras of black aviation history. In 1924 his fund-raising campaign for a solo flight from New York to Africa came under the scrutiny of postal authorities and the FBI, who suspected mail fraud. The investigators were apparently satisfied when, to much acclaim, Julian made a Fourth of July takeoff from Long Island, only to crash before the crowd of well-wishers and sightseers that had gathered to see him off.<sup>35</sup> In 1926 and 1928 Julian again announced plans for a transatlantic flight but on neither occasion did he even attempt a takeoff.<sup>36</sup>

Julian began the decade of the 1930s by traveling to Ethiopia, apparently winning the confidence of Emperor Haile Selassie and returning to the United States as Colonel Hubert Fauntleroy Julian of the Ethiopian Air Force, accoutered in "white jodhpurs, blue tunic, tan pith helmet with royal crest, and high leather boots with spurs."<sup>37</sup> He ended it by challenging the head of Nazi Germany's Luftwaffe, Herman Goering, to an air duel over the English Channel.<sup>38</sup> Throughout the decade he was constantly in the news, leaving Ethiopia in disgrace after crashing the emperor's prize airplane, claiming to be the personal pilot of the black religious leader Father Divine, performing in air circuses, returning to Ethiopia and brawling with another black pilot who became prominent during the 'thirties--John C. Robinson--in an Addis Ababa hotel, and volunteering to fly for the Finnish Air Force after the Soviet invasion.<sup>39</sup>

As the only black aviator who came to the attention of most white Americans during the interwar years, Julian's posturing, swaggering, and blustering reinforced white America's preconceived notion that blacks were at best inept pilots, seriously undermining the credibility of legitimate black aviators striving to prove that whites did not have a monopoly on flying aptitude. By the mid-1930s he had become an embarrassment to serious-minded blacks, and he was soundly condemned by black editors. The Boston Chronicle finally refused to advertise his public appearances, explaining that "we see Harlem's 'Black Eagle' as a blatant jackdaw. We trust Boston will never be inflicted with him again. . . . Julian talks loudly about his being a 'black' man. We wish he were otherwise."<sup>40</sup>

Despite the handicap of Julian's antics, black fliers struggled on. After the news of Lindbergh's flight electrified the nation and the world, black Americans were attracted to aviation in increasing numbers. In June 1927, a month after Lindbergh crossed the Atlantic, an editorial in the Pittsburgh Courier asked rhetorically "What Will the Negro Contribute to Aviation?" Those who complained that no black had gained fame in the air were reminded "that a



Negro youth would have stronger prejudices to combat than a Lindbergh . . . [and] that no Negro youth has as yet become a serious part of any aviation service." Black Americans could nevertheless anticipate, the editorial continued, "that some youth of ours, inspired by this feat of Lindbergh, will begin a serious apprenticeship in aeronautics. And let us hope that he will show the same stamina as Lindbergh in face of ridicule . . . and the same modesty in the face of success."<sup>41</sup>

Although Lindbergh's flight prompted the Pittsburgh Courier to call for the emergence of his black counterpart, a handful of black Americans had been in the air for over twenty-five years. Despite sometimes overwhelming difficulties, they had learned to fly, demonstrating that the racism and segregation of American society could not completely bar black Americans who were determined to take to the air.

## Chapter Two

### THE EMERGENCE OF BLACK AMERICA'S AIR HEROES: 1927-1936

The Pittsburgh Courier's call for a black Lindbergh went unanswered for over five years. Although the first black air heroes did not emerge until late 1932, black Americans were nevertheless active in aviation between 1927 and 1932. In the wake of the Lucky Lindy's flight, Bessie Coleman was immortalized as the aeronautical pioneer of the race while Afro-Americans took to the air in increasing numbers--they established aero clubs, published a flying magazine, organized traveling air circuses, and attempted long-distance publicity flights. Then in 1932 two young Americans winged their way into aviation history when they became the first blacks to complete a transcontinental flight. Close on their heels, another black flying duo completed a series of long distance flights in 1933 and 1934. When the Italian-Ethiopian conflict erupted in 1935, a black flier from Chicago flew in the service of the Ethiopian emperor and dominated the headlines of America's black newspapers.

Despite the wide coverage of the exploits of these fliers in the black press, white Americans remained, for the most part, quite oblivious to the burgeoning black interest in aviation during the post-Lindbergh era. If whites thought about blacks in aviation at all, one of two unflattering stereotypes usually prevailed. Hubert Julian served as the archetype for one, the swaggering, boastful black who claimed to be an expert pilot but was actually quite incompetent, the aeronautical equivalent of Kingfish, the self-important black attorney of the popular radio show "Amos 'n Andy." Most whites, however, assumed that blacks were simply overwhelmed by the technological complexity of airplanes and possessed an inherent fear of flying. Lindbergh reinforced this stereotype in his popular autobiography "We", published in 1927 shortly after his transatlantic flight, by devoting six pages to a condescending description of his experiences with rural Mississippi blacks while barnstorming through the South in the early 1920s. He reported that an elderly black woman asked "Boss!

How much you all charge foah take me up to Heaben and leave me deah?" and he described an encounter with a young black man, who boldly agreed to take a flight when some conniving whites paid his fare, having conspired earlier with Lindbergh to "give this negro a stunt ride." As he climbed aboard, the unwitting black passenger reassured a group of black onlookers, telling them "he would wave his red bandanna handkerchief over the side of the cockpit during the entire flight to show them he was still unafraid." According to Lindbergh's account, the black youth panicked on the takeoff roll and "with the first deviation from straight flight my passenger had his head down on the floor of the cockpit but continued to wave the red handkerchief with one hand while he was holding on to everything available with the other, although he was held in securely with the safety belt." The handkerchief disappeared, Lindbergh reported, when he attempted a loop, and "it was not until we were almost touching the ground that the bandanna appeared again over the cowling."<sup>42</sup>

The portrayal of blacks as technological illiterates, who either feigned aeronautical competence or were overcome by irrational fears once they became airborne, was a serious obstacle to aspiring black pilots. They could expect little encouragement from the white aviation community, for "[t]hose who manufactured the early planes, or established aviation companies, or flew or serviced them, were a close-knit group into whose 'brotherhood' the black man could not be received as an equal."<sup>43</sup>

Despite these obstacles, by 1927 blacks were entering the field of aviation in increasing numbers. Several months before Lindbergh's Atlantic crossing, Joel "Ace" Foreman of Los Angeles attempted a transcontinental flight, the first bona fide attempt at a long-distance flight by a black. Foreman and his mechanic, Artis Ward, left Los Angeles for New York City in February 1927, flying a patched-up Curtiss DH-4, sponsored by a local black newspaper, the California Eagle, and the Los Angeles chapter of the NAACP. After an engine malfunction grounded the pair in Salt Lake City for several weeks, they eventually made Chicago, where additional mechanical problems brought the flight to a premature end.<sup>44</sup>

After Lindbergh's flight, black America's hopes for an air hero loomed large. The readers of the National Urban League's monthly magazine, Opportunity, learned that a Negro, Samuel V. B. Sauzereseteo, had flown from Moscow to Berlin, from Belgium to the African Congo, and from Paris to London.<sup>45</sup> When pineapple magnate James Dole offered a total of \$35,000 for the first two non-stop flights from the United States mainland to the Hawaiian Islands, the Pittsburgh Courier announced that two black fliers from California intended to compete for the prize money, Walter E. Swagerty of San Francisco and Clarence E. Martin of Oakland. Swagerty, who had reportedly designed a flying machine in 1911, told reporters he learned to fly in 1914 and had appeared at county fairs throughout the Southwest. Martin claimed he had received his first flying lesson from stunt pilot Lincoln Beachey and then went on to become an airmail pilot.<sup>46</sup> Neither pilot was among the official entrants for the Dole Prize; Martin subsequently announced that he would not compete and that there were no other black fliers in the race.<sup>47</sup> Another young black man,

Jesse Boland, also made aviation news in 1927 when he reportedly built an airplane and made a demonstration flight of several hours duration over his home town of Roanoke, Virginia.<sup>48</sup>

Toward the end of the 1920s the number of blacks interested in aviation had grown to the point that aviation clubs began appearing; by 1936 some thirty-seven flying clubs had been organized and twenty-four were still active.<sup>49</sup> Although a black aviation club was reported in Los Angeles as early as 1921,<sup>50</sup> the movement did not really begin until late in the decade. Julian, who in 1922 had sought to organize an aviation arm in Garvey's UNIA, tried once again to attract a following in May 1929 when he announced the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Aviation Amongst Colored Races.<sup>51</sup> This organization probably existed only in Julian's mind, but in the fall of the same year, the Universal Aviation Association held the "first national aviation meet of Negro fliers" at Checkerboard Field near Chicago, where Bessie Coleman had launched her aviation career in the United States six years earlier. At least six Chicago blacks demonstrated their flying skills at the meet, and Dr. A. Porter Davis, a physician from Missouri who had been flying for over a year, piloted his own airplane cross-country to attend the event.<sup>52</sup>

In May 1930 the Bessie Coleman Aero Clubs published the first number of a new monthly flying magazine, Bessie Coleman Aero News.<sup>53</sup> The organization and its magazine were the brainchildren of William J. Powell, a Chicago black who became a thoroughgoing aviation enthusiast during the post-Lindbergh aviation boom. Rejected by the Air Corps and by civilian aviation schools in the Midwest, Powell moved to Los Angeles where he was accepted by a local flying school. Powell quickly formed a group of like-minded blacks--including James Herman Banning, who had already distinguished himself in 1927 by becoming the first black pilot licensed by the Bureau of Air Commerce--and began an ambitious campaign to establish a network of local black flying clubs organized nationally as the Bessie Coleman Aero Clubs, Inc.<sup>54</sup> The group received national attention in 1929 when black Congressman Oscar DePriest visited Los Angeles: Powell arranged for an airplane owned by the club to be christened "The Oscar DePriest," and the congressman took a flight in the craft with Banning. DePriest took it all in stride and observed enthusiastically that the "field of aviation presents great opportunities to the Negro and he should enter it at once."<sup>55</sup>

Powell hoped that Negroes could "get in on the ground floor" of the aviation industry. The first issue of Bessie Coleman Aero News contained his message to "The Negro Youth of America." He urged black youth to train for an aviation career, telling them with evangelistic fervor: "There is a better job and a better future for you in aviation than any other industry. The reason is this: Aviation is just beginning its period of growth. Aviation is going to be America's next gigantic industry, and if you can get into it now while it is still uncrowded, you can grow as aviation grows."<sup>56</sup> Powell believed that the demand for skilled fliers and mechanics would be so great that trained, competent blacks could overcome the racial barriers that had traditionally excluded them from responsible positions in other branches of the transportation industry.<sup>57</sup> Yet scarcely a year after Powell began

proselytizing to young blacks, the organizers of the Air Line Pilots Association included a clause in the union's bylaws which restricted membership to whites only.<sup>58</sup>

While Powell was organizing blacks in the West and attempting to establish a national flying organization, other air-minded blacks were also banding together locally to promote aviation. In Chicago John C. Robinson, who in 1931 had graduated from the local Curtiss-Wright School after he convinced its director to accept him, organized the Brown Eagle Aero Club,<sup>59</sup> subsequently reorganized as the Challenger Air Pilot Association.<sup>60</sup> In 1932 the International Colored Aeronautical Association sought to bridge national borders when it sponsored an unsuccessful flight by Leon Paris from New York City to his native Haiti.<sup>61</sup>

Thus for five long years after Lindbergh emerged as the hero of the machine age, black America waited for the appearance of a "colored Lindy": Bullard had abandoned flying and was forgotten; Julian was an embarrassment; nothing more was heard of Sauzereseteo, who was apparently not an American; and Foreman, Martin, Swagerty, Boland, and Paris lapsed into obscurity. In the interim, the memory of Bessie Coleman inspired air-minded blacks; her untimely death, her flying credentials, and the fact that she was an attractive woman engaged in an extremely dangerous pursuit made it inevitable that she would become a virtual patron saint to blacks who aspired to fly. The most obvious tribute to her memory was, of course, Powell's use of her name for his club and magazine.<sup>62</sup> The Brown Eagle Aero Club and its successors also honored Bessie: they adopted the practice of flying over Chicago each Memorial Day and scattering flowers in her memory.<sup>63</sup> Black journalists who sketched the history of blacks in aviation invariably portrayed Bessie as the aeronautical pioneer of the race, a perceptive, petite young lady who saw her race's future in the air but died before her dreams could be realized.<sup>64</sup>

Perhaps the most eloquent testimony to both the black public's desire for an air hero and the role the memory of Bessie Coleman played until one appeared, is Harry Levette's poem "Call of the Wings," published by the Pittsburgh Courier in 1931:

Black men! Last to the call of wings,  
As the myriads of ships course the skies!  
Each an Argonaut venturing brings,  
Golden fleece from the land where it flies  
High over white peak, angry sea,  
Man is fearlessly conquering the air,  
History making. The entry is free--  
Black men! Say, why are you not there?

Are you cowardly, spineless, and weak,  
That your feet cling closely to the earth?  
Rise from your lethargy; this new field seek!  
You've won others; in this, prove your worth.  
A mere girl pioneered for the Race,

But our men let her sacrifice fail.  
Fly! Fly! With the nations keep pace!  
Let the sun glint your silver sail.<sup>65</sup>

The following year two young black men answered the "Call of the Wings." On 9 October 1932 J. Herman Banning and his mechanic, Thomas Allen, landed at Roosevelt Field on Long Island. Eighteen days earlier, on 21 September, they had departed Los Angeles in an open-cockpit biplane hoping to become the first Afro-Americans to cross the continent by air. Black America rejoiced at their success, calling them "suntanned editions of the Lindy of yesteryear" and presenting them with commemorative medals to honor their achievement. For nine weeks the black public relived the trials and triumphs of their flight in a series of columns the pair contributed to the Pittsburgh Courier.<sup>66</sup>

The Banning-Allen flight ushered in a new era in black aviation, though many feared that Banning's untimely death in an air crash the following February might thwart further black achievement in the air.<sup>67</sup> Instead, the mounting interest and experience of air-minded blacks quickly brought more successes and attracted even more Negroes to the ranks of the aviation enthusiasts. Less than six months after Banning's death another black flying team appeared and embarked on a series of ambitious long-distance flights, hoping to publicize aviation and encourage more black Americans to take to the air. Dr. Albert E. Forsythe and his flying partner, Charles Alfred Anderson, brought a unique combination of financial resources and flying skill to black aviation. In 1933 they embarked on a series of long-distance flights that were widely covered in the black press and helped to promote wider interest in aviation among black Americans.

Forsythe, the son of a civil engineer, was born in Nassau in 1897, spent his boyhood in Jamaica, and then came to the United States to attend Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. He continued his education at the University of Illinois and McGill University in Montreal, where he earned a medical degree. By 1932, after establishing his medical practice in Atlantic City, he became an aviation enthusiast, giving unselfishly of his time, energy, and money to the promotion of aviation among his race.<sup>68</sup> Anderson described him years later as "a very, very aggressive and determined man and an ambitious person [who] wanted to advance aviation among the blacks."<sup>69</sup> A practical man, Forsythe did not fly merely for the sake of flying. Rather, he considered airplanes efficient and useful transportation devices, once declaring to Anderson that he liked "to go places in an airplane. That's what an airplane is for, to travel, not just fly around the home field."<sup>70</sup>

But Charles Alfred Anderson simply loved to fly. Ten years younger than Forsythe, Anderson spent his early years with his grandmother in the Shenandoah Valley near Staunton, Virginia, where he developed an intense fascination with airplanes and flying. His love of aviation remained strong after he returned to his parents' home in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, near his birthplace. Unable to obtain flying lessons because of racial prejudice, he bought an airplane on borrowed money and taught himself to fly. In 1929 he became one of the first black pilots in the nation to earn a private license. Three years later, he

became the first black to qualify as a transport pilot; this was the highest rating then issued by the Department of Commerce, and authorized him to fly passengers for hire and teach others to fly. Forsythe, fifty miles away in Atlantic City, New Jersey, learned of Anderson's achievement from reports in the black press, contacted the young pilot, and asked for flying lessons.<sup>71</sup>

Thus began the Forsythe-Anderson partnership. Forsythe's medical practice provided the financial resources for the team, and Anderson, as the nation's best-qualified black pilot, provided the flying expertise. In July 1933 the two made headlines in the black press and earned a place in aviation history when they became the first black pilots to complete a round-trip transcontinental flight across the United States.<sup>72</sup> Flying Forsythe's Fairchild monoplane, dubbed the "Pride of Atlantic City" for the occasion, the two aviators flew from Atlantic City to Los Angeles and then back again, where they were greeted by a cheering crowd of two thousand.<sup>73</sup> Several months later they made a round-trip flight from Atlantic City to Montreal, becoming the first American blacks to plan and execute a flight across international borders.<sup>74</sup>

The following year, Forsythe and Anderson launched plans for their third and most ambitious long-distance flight. Touted as the "Pan-American Goodwill Flight," it was to be a month-long, 12,000-mile air tour of over twenty countries throughout South America, the Caribbean, and Central America, under the sponsorship of the Inter-racial Aviation Goodwill Committee (IGAC).<sup>75</sup> To publicize the event, the IGAC obtained the support of Forsythe's alma mater, Tuskegee Institute, the famous school established in 1883 by the influential black leader, Booker T. Washington. In September 1934, Washington's successor, President R. R. Moton, publicly endorsed the project when he christened Forsythe's new airplane "The Booker T. Washington" in special ceremonies on the Tuskegee campus.<sup>76</sup> The event marks the first time the name of Tuskegee Institute was linked publicly to a major aviation initiative. The event attracted the support of the campus community, who rallied behind the fliers and launched a successful fund-raising campaign. Moreover Institute secretary G. Lake Imes, a key member of Moton's staff, worked on the aviators' behalf in Washington and New York, and he subsequently proposed that Tuskegee Institute actively promote future international flights the two pilots hoped to undertake.<sup>77</sup>

Forsythe and Anderson took off from Atlantic City in the "Booker T. Washington" on 8 November 1934. Except for minor problems, the first ten days of the flight went as planned as the two fliers island-hopped across the Caribbean. On 18 November an engine failure grounded them for three weeks in the Dominican Republic. By 8 December repairs to the "Booker T. Washington" had been completed, and the Goodwill Fliers began to make their way southward down the Lesser Antilles, headed for the South American continent. Less than a week later, however, the Pan-American Goodwill Flight came to a premature end before the "Booker T. Washington" ever touched South American soil. As Forsythe and Anderson departed Port of Spain, Trinidad, heavy with extra fuel for the long flight to Georgetown, British Guiana, their small craft climbed so slowly after lift-off that the landing gear clipped a stand of bamboo and

pieces became lodged in the wheel housing. The trailing bamboo sections created extra drag, causing the overweight aircraft to stall and crash in a crowded residential area. Miraculously, neither pilot was seriously injured, nor did the fuel ignite and pose a hazard to bystanders. But the "Booker T. Washington" was damaged beyond repair and the Pan-American Goodwill Flight came to an abrupt end.<sup>78</sup>

Following the unfortunate conclusion to the flight, the Forsythe-Anderson flying team broke up. Anderson relied on his steadily improving flying skills to sustain himself financially, but the loss of the "Booker T. Washington" ended Forsythe's active involvement in aviation, though he never lost interest.<sup>79</sup> Although the Forsythe-Anderson flights ended on a disappointing note, they demonstrated the legitimacy of black aspirations in the field of aviation. For the first time, important white newspapers and magazines took the aeronautical ambitions of black Americans seriously, with articles on their plans and the Caribbean flight appearing in both the New York Times and Newsweek.<sup>80</sup> Thus the failure of the flight and the break up of the Forsythe-Anderson partnership brought an untimely end to what was perhaps the most promising initiative in black aviation of the 1930s.

Several months after Forsythe and Anderson's mishap in Trinidad, another Tuskegee alumnus, Chicago aviator John C. Robinson, sailed for Ethiopia to begin an adventure that brought him fame and almost brought an aviation program to Tuskegee Institute. When Robinson boarded a steamer bound for the horn of Africa, he reflected the concerns of many black Americans for Ethiopia, a country about to fall victim to the colonial appetite of the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini. Emperor Menelik II's decisive defeat of the Italians at Adowa in 1896 preserved Ethiopia's independence for four decades, while most of Africa fell victim to European imperialism. The victory profoundly affected black Americans: Ethiopia, which traced its roots back to the ancient kingdom of Abyssinia, had maintained her independence by force of arms, "the first time since Hannibal [that] an African people had successfully repulsed a major European army. And the significance of this battle was not lost upon Afro-Americans."<sup>81</sup>

The coronation of Emperor Haile Selassie in 1930, an impressive event which caught the attention of the international press, reawakened the interest of American blacks in the ancient African kingdom, especially those of Robinson's generation who followed closely the new emperor's program of reform and modernization. After Italian and Ethiopian troops clashed along the Ethiopian-Italian Somaliland border in early December 1934, the horn of Africa became the center of world attention. The dispute was quickly referred to the League of Nations, but Mussolini had no interest in negotiated settlements--he was resolved to avenge the ignominious defeat at Adowa and add to his colonial possessions. By the spring of 1935 an Italian invasion appeared imminent, and black Americans became increasingly concerned over the fate of Ethiopia. Most responded by raising funds through organizations such as United Aid to Ethiopia.<sup>82</sup> Robinson, however, offered a different kind of aid; he volunteered to fly for Haile Selassie's air force.

Early in 1935, through the good offices of Claude A. Barnett, director of the Associated Negro Press (ANP), Robinson met Malaku E. Bayen, a member of the royal family attending medical school at Howard University in Washington, D.C.<sup>83</sup> When he told Bayen of his ambitions to serve the Selassie regime, the young medical student communicated Robinson's offer to Addis Ababa. In April, after Robinson provided satisfactory references and credentials, the Ethiopian monarch cabled Robinson and offered the aviator a commission in his imperial army on the condition that he serve for at least a year; on 2 May Robinson had departed for Africa, arriving in Addis Ababa on the 29th.<sup>84</sup> During the summer of 1935, while the League of Nations tried to negotiate a peaceful settlement, the young aviator from Chicago won the full confidence of the Ethiopian officials, and by August, he had been commissioned a colonel and given command of the miniscule Ethiopian air force.<sup>85</sup>

When the fighting broke out--the Italians invaded without a declaration of war on 3 October 1935--the circumstances in which Robinson found himself made it inevitable that the black press would portray him as a hero.<sup>86</sup> Except for Hubert F. Julian (who briefly held command of the Ethiopian air force and then was transferred to a ground unit when he discredited himself with the Emperor), Robinson was the only American black in the Ethiopian armed forces.<sup>87</sup> He held high commissioned rank and served in a new and elite branch, the air force. The black war correspondents quickly dubbed him the "Brown Condor," hoping he would deliver another embarrassing blow to the Italians as Joe Louis had done the previous June when he took the heavyweight championship from Primo Carnera with a knockout in the sixth round and earned his well-known sobriquet, the "Brown Bomber."<sup>88</sup>

Throughout the war Robinson provided Afro-American correspondents with colorful copy, and the articles on him frequently noted that Tuskegee Institute was his alma mater. The school, of course, took tremendous pride in his accomplishments, and shortly after he took command of the tiny Ethiopian air force, the student newspaper published an article on the new colonel. Under headlines that announced "Tuskegee Graduate Heads Ethiopian Air Force" was an emphatic endorsement of Robinson and his service in Africa: "It is unnecessary to state the degree of pride with which the whole Tuskegee family regards Mr. Robinson. He is more than a race pioneer in the field of aviation, he is a link in that chain which binds us to Africa."<sup>89</sup> Once the fighting broke out more articles appeared proclaiming pride in the Tuskegee alumnus and "the fine qualities that make him great in the eyes of the world" and declaring him "An Aviation Hero."<sup>90</sup>

Like most of the Ethiopian armed forces, the air force under the Brown Condor's command was no match for the Italians. At most, it consisted of nineteen obsolescent aircraft, some fifty Ethiopian pilots, and a handful of foreigner aviators. Such a force was powerless against the Italian fighters, who easily controlled the skies.<sup>91</sup> Consequently, Robinson flew mostly courier missions between the front and the capital, and also served as the emperor's personal pilot.<sup>92</sup> By the spring 1936, the superior Italian forces, using poison gas, had gained the upper hand; on 5 May Il Duce's forces took Addis Ababa, and four days later Italy annexed Ethiopia. Fortunately for the Brown



Condor, he was not in Ethiopia when the Italians took control, but was en route to the United States on a fund raising tour.<sup>93</sup>

On his return to the United States, black America gave Robinson a hero's welcome. Following his arrival in New York on 18 May 1936, the Brown Condor visited Harlem's Rockland Palace, where an enthusiastic crowd of 5,000 attending a public reception sponsored by United Aid for Ethiopia treated the colonel to a fifteen-minute ovation.<sup>94</sup> But the New York celebration was only a warm-up for the welcome Chicago gave its home town hero the next day. On Sunday Barnett and Robinson flew to the Windy City, where a crowd of 3,000 greeted them as they stepped from a TWA airliner. The crowd swelled as Robinson led a procession of 500 automobiles from the airport to Chicago's Southside, where he addressed a cheering throng of 8,000 from the balcony of the Grand Hotel.<sup>95</sup> Caught up in the excitement, the Chicago Defender reporter covering the celebration wrote that never had "there been such a demonstration as was accorded the 31-year-old Chicago aviator who left the United States thirteen months ago and literally covered himself in glory, trying to preserve the independence of the last African empire."<sup>96</sup>

The news accounts of Robinson's homecoming also reported that he would be joining the faculty at Tuskegee Institute to teach aviation.<sup>97</sup> Indeed, since 1934 Robinson had been in contact with his alma mater regarding the establishment of an aviation course.<sup>98</sup> In 1935 Tuskegee offered Robinson a position on the faculty to teach aviation but he declined, choosing instead to travel to Ethiopia and fly for the Emperor.<sup>99</sup> When his homecoming was imminent, Tuskegee once again invited the aviator to join the faculty. Unfortunately, the Institute and Robinson were unable to agree on the details of the contract, and the Brown Condor decided to stay in Chicago and open his own flying school.<sup>100</sup>

Robinson's homecoming celebration marked the end of the second period of black aviation history. It was an era initially dominated by the search for a black counterpart to Lindbergh, with the focus after 1932 on the newsworthy achievements of a few notable black aviators. Beginning in 1936, however, the emphasis shifted to broader participation in aviation and the development of stronger regional and national black flying organizations.

### Chapter Three

#### THE BROADENING OF BLACK PARTICIPATION IN AVIATION: 1936-1939

The final era of black aviation history before World War II, the years 1936-1939, were characterized by an expansion in the numbers of black Americans involved in aviation and the emergence of regional centers of black aviation activity. Ultimately, one of the regional centers established a national organization of black fliers, and when the nation began the pre-World War II expansion of military and civilian aviation in 1939, black aviators were in a

position to lobby Congress for the right to participate in federally-sponsored flight training programs.

By 1936 two centers of black aviation had emerged, one in Los Angeles and another in Chicago. The Los Angeles center was the work of William J. Powell, the aviation enthusiast who had established the Bessie Coleman Aero Club earlier in the decade. Until the advent of President Roosevelt's New Deal, Powell had been forced to rely exclusively on racial self-help initiatives to finance the training of black pilots and mechanics. In 1936, however, he began to offer aviation classes under the auspices of the Emergency Education Program, a recovery initiative begun during the first year of Roosevelt's administration. In order to become eligible for the program, Powell had obtained a certificate to teach aeronautics from the California Board of Education and then applied for authorization to offer federally-funded aviation courses at a local high school. By 1937, some 250 students, mostly Negroes, had received training under the program. Encouraged by the success of the endeavor, Powell established Craftsmen of Black Wings, a non-profit, self-help organization formed to promote aviation among blacks. He also began to publish a new magazine, Craftsmen Aero News, which he described as "the first Negro trade journal in the United States."<sup>101</sup>

Three individuals were responsible for the emergence of Chicago as a center of black aviation in the late 1930s--Cornelius Coffey, Willa Brown, and Enoch P. Waters. Coffey's enthusiasm for aviation dated from 1931, when John Robinson "converted [him] from an auto mechanic to an airplane and engine mechanic and interested him in becoming a flier." Until Robinson's departure from Chicago in 1935, they worked together to train "scores of pilots, mechanics, navigators and parachute jumpers who became the nucleus" of a Chicago-based national association of black aviation enthusiasts. With Robinson in Ethiopia, Coffey took over as the "top authority of the local group" of black aviators but he lacked the Brown Condor's flair for publicity. Although "completely devoted to aviation," Coffey was a "quiet retiring man of few words . . . content being an unnoticed instructor because it allowed him to spend his days at the airport."<sup>102</sup> By early 1936, Willa Brown assumed the role of promoter of black aviation activities in Chicago and allied herself with the taciturn Coffey, who willingly deferred to his attractive and charismatic cohort. Shortly before Robinson's return from Africa, Brown approached Enoch Waters, city editor for the influential Chicago Defender, seeking publicity for an air show Chicago's black pilots were planning. Waters recalled vividly the scene when she entered the newspaper's offices: "When Willa Brown, a shapely young brownskin woman, wearing white jodhpurs, a form fitting white jacket and white boots, strode into our newsroom, in 1936, she made such a stunning appearance that all the typewriters suddenly went silent."<sup>103</sup> When Waters learned that Brown represented some thirty black fliers, he proposed that the air show become an annual event sponsored by the newspaper. The owner of the Defender, Robert Abbott--the man who had encouraged Bessie Coleman to go to France for flying lessons--readily agreed.<sup>104</sup>

Though he never learned to fly, Waters became an avid supporter of black aviation. He urged Brown and Coffey to broaden their horizons and establish a national organization for black aviators and their supporters.<sup>105</sup> A nationwide organization, Waters maintained, would stimulate publicity in other black newspapers, would "give us better information about aviation activities elsewhere in the country and provide us with a vehicle to campaign for our goals." By 1937 Coffey, Brown, Waters, and nine other Chicago blacks had organized the National Airmen's Association of America (NAAA), chartered by the state of Illinois and headquartered at the offices of the Chicago Defender.<sup>106</sup> Waters and Brown handled the NAAA membership drive; Waters recalled later they quickly established NAAA chapters "in several cities in the Midwest and East, with flying visits by Willa providing the impetus. These chapters weren't big, consisting of just six to a dozen fliers. Considering there were only about two hundred Negroes flying in the country, we were satisfied with the response."<sup>107</sup>

Thus by 1938 there were several hundred black pilots throughout the nation and, thanks to the efforts of the NAAA and the coverage of the black press, they were receiving a fair amount of publicity in the black community. Still, the opportunities were limited. Black pilots were almost exclusively amateur pilots; none of the opportunities for earning a livelihood in aviation available to whites were open to blacks. They were excluded from commercial aviation, and, although they were taxpaying citizens, they could not serve as pilots in the army or navy, or fly the mail. Earlier in the decade the Chicago Defender had questioned the absence of black airmail pilots:

Why are there no black airmail pilots? What is there about this service that makes it all white. Dark men do just about everything else Americans do. Why can't they fly her mails? We are taxed to support this country, we help pay her bills, maintain her governments, contribute to her general welfare, but we can't take part in her aviation development. It's about time some person in the government authority explained this to us.<sup>108</sup>

The Defender sounded a theme that was to be heard with increasing frequency as the decade wore on--black Americans had a right to participate in federal programs which promoted aviation. Perhaps the first step toward black participation in federal aviation programs was taken in May 1938 when two black fliers, Dr. Theodore Cable and Grover Nash, received temporary commissions to fly the mail in celebration of National Air Mail Week. Nash, a charter member of the NAAA, flew an Illinois route from Chicago to Charleston via Mattoon.<sup>109</sup> Cable, an Indianapolis city councilman and Democratic candidate for the Indiana state legislature, also flew an intrastate route, from Indianapolis to Greencastle; the flight had been arranged at the behest of G. N. T. Gray and Percy L. Hines of the National Postal Alliance, an organization of black postal workers.<sup>110</sup>

Thus black Americans had made a small but impressive beginning in the field of aviation by January 1939, the month President Roosevelt, concerned over the deteriorating situation in Europe, asked Congress for a special

appropriation of \$525 million for national defense. Almost two-thirds of the funds the president requested were earmarked for aviation--\$300 million for a 3,000-airplane expansion of the Air Corps and \$10 million for the "training of civilian air pilots."<sup>111</sup> President Roosevelt's call for greater federal support for aviation was welcome news to the nation's aviation community, but the prospect of expanded aviation training under federal sponsorship had a special significance to blacks interested in flying. Black aviators had long realized that their prospects for progress in the field of aviation were limited as long as opportunities open to whites--military aviation, flying the mail, and commercial flying--remained closed. Now new opportunities for government-funded flight training were under consideration by Congress and black aviation enthusiasts were determined to fight for the rights of black Americans to be included.

Congress responded to President Roosevelt's appropriation request, with two acts, one that authorized the expansion of the Air Corps and another that established the Civilian Pilot Training (CPT) Program, an initiative to provide federally-funded flying training to tens of thousands of college-age youth.<sup>112</sup> The final versions of both acts contained provisos aimed at insuring that black Americans were included in the expanded pilot training programs.

The bill relating to the expansion of the Air Corps was Public Law 18, "the primary legislative authorization for the Air Corps expansion program."<sup>113</sup> Section Four of P. L. 18, approved by the President on 3 April 1939, required that at least one flight training school be earmarked "for the training of any Negro air pilot"<sup>114</sup> a provision that was not part of the original version of the act. The inclusion of this amendment, with the ostensible objective of training blacks for duty as Air Corps pilots, constituted the first legislative victory in the prewar campaign for full participation in the armed forces. The original impetus for the amendment came out of the efforts of Edgar G. Brown, a Negro politician and lobbyist who had not shown an interest in aviation, until he came under the influence Dr. Theodore Cable, one of the black pilots who had had flown an airmail publicity flight the previous year. Brown appeared before the Senate Military Affairs Committee on 21 February to urge that H. R. 3791, the bill ultimately approved as P. L. 18, be amended to provide black Americans with the opportunity to serve as pilots in the Air Corps.<sup>115</sup> Although the bill that was approved contained a proviso relating to the training of black pilots, it had been worded in such a way that the Air Corps could maintain that it contained "absolutely nothing that directs us to enlist negro flying cadets."<sup>116</sup>

The Civilian Pilot Training Act of 1939 produced more tangible benefits for black Americans than P. L. 18. When legislation calling for the establishment of a program for training civilian pilots was introduced in March 1939, it did not address the issue of training black pilots.<sup>117</sup> On 19 April, when the civilian pilot training bill was debated on the floor of the House of Representatives, Illinois Congressman Everett Dirksen offered an amendment which stipulated that "none of the benefits of training or programs shall be denied on account of race, creed, or color."<sup>118</sup> Several weeks later, while the legislation was still pending, the NAAA sponsored a nationwide air tour to

promote interest in the new federal aviation initiatives. As the two Chicago aviators selected to make the tour were preparing for the flight, Enoc Waters suggested that they include a stop in the nation's capital on their itinerary. Waters put the two NAAA pilots, Chauncey Spencer and Dale White, in contact with Edgar G. Brown, who agreed to serve as the organization's Washington representative. After Spencer and White arrived in Washington, Brown introduced them to a number of officials, including Congressman Dirksen and Missouri Senator Harry S. Truman.<sup>119</sup> According to Spencer, Truman was surprised to learn that blacks were excluded from the Air Corps and helped to "put through legislation insuring that Negroes would be trained along with whites in the Civilian Pilot Training Program."<sup>120</sup> The efforts of Dirksen, Truman, and the NAAA were successful; the Civilian Pilot Training Act that was approved on 27 June 1939 contained, word for word, the proviso that Dirksen had proposed in April.<sup>121</sup> When the CPT Program was launched in the fall of 1939, several black colleges, including Tuskegee Institute, were among the first schools to participate.<sup>122</sup>

The passage of P. L. 18 and the Civilian Pilot Training Act in 1939 marked the end of the pre-World War II era of black aviation history. These two laws helped precipitate the campaign for admitting black Americans to the Air Corps. Even though Air Corps leaders found a loophole in P. L. 18 which allowed them to perpetuate their policy of exclusion for several more years, the law served an important function. It provided black leaders and their supporters in Congress with an opportunity to challenge the War Department on the issue of admitting blacks.<sup>123</sup> The CPT Program was also important because it provided an opportunity, at government expense, for scores of black youth to learn to fly. The activities of the CPT units at black colleges like Tuskegee Institute, Hampton Institute, and Howard University were widely covered in the black press.<sup>124</sup> The success of these black CPT students made the Air Corps' refusal to accept blacks all the more incongruous. By the fall of 1940 the campaign for admitting blacks to the Air Corps became so intense that the War Department directed the Air Corps to train blacks as military pilots.<sup>125</sup> In 1941 a segregated black squadron was established at a new Army flying field constructed near Tuskegee, Alabama.<sup>126</sup> By the end of World War II, almost one-thousand black Americans had earned their wings at Tuskegee, and about half saw combat as fighter pilots in Europe.<sup>127</sup> Today they are known as the Tuskegee Airmen.

### Conclusion

The participation of black Americans in the CPT Program and the formation of the segregated air units were milestones in the history of black aviation; finally, black Americans did not have to rely entirely on their own resources to enter the field of aviation. But without the efforts of a handful of dedicated black fliers, who struggled against incredible odds to demonstrate that skin color had nothing to do with flying aptitude, these opportunities might not have materialized. During the first four decades of the twentieth century--in the face of strict segregation, endemic racism, and economic deprivation--America's black air pioneers had pursued the dream of flight.

Until the post-Lindbergh aviation boom, their efforts were scattered and sporadic. In the aftermath of the Lone Eagle's flight, the black public looked for the emergence of a black air hero, and for several years the memory of Bessie Coleman encouraged black Americans who yearned to see the race find its place in the air. Then in 1932 Banning and Allen became the first black American to complete a transcontinental flight, and by 1936 the aeronautical exploits of three other black pilots--Forsythe, Anderson, and Robinson--had won the acclaim of the black public. The accomplishments of these five pilots, and those who came before them, provided ample evidence of black achievement in aviation, and the black press touted them as the race's air heroes. Consequently, black participation in aviation broadened after 1936, and a national organization of black fliers was established.

By the end of the decade the exploits and activities of these black air pioneers, carefully chronicled in black newspapers and magazines, had helped create an air-minded black public. Thus when bills came before Congress in early 1939 to expand the Air Corps and establish a federally-funded program for training civilian pilots, black aviation enthusiasts made sure there were spokesmen on Capitol Hill to represent the interests of black Americans and influence the legislative process. But most important, they had opened the eyes of a new generation of black youth to the possibilities in the air. Perhaps the most compelling testimony to their contribution was the ambition of a young black American, who declared in the late 1930s: "I intend to fly some day at any cost. I'd like to . . . study under that fellow who flew for Haile Selassie in Ethiopia. That's the kind of life I like."<sup>128</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Atlanta Daily World, 8 October 1938 in John W. Kitchens and Jonell Chisom Jones, eds., Microfilm Edition of The Tuskegee Institute News Clippings File, 252 reels (Tuskegee, Ala.: Tuskegee Institute, 1978), reel 57, frame 381 (hereafter cited as Tuskegee Clippings File, with reel numbers and frame numbers separated by a colon, i.e. 57:381); Joseph J. Corn, The Winged Gospel: America's Romance with Aviation, 1900-1950 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Corn, Winged Gospel, p. vii.

<sup>3</sup> U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, Negro Aviators (15 August 1936). This publication, the earliest known compilation of black pilots by a federal agency, is not widely available in federal repository libraries; the copy cited is from the holdings of the Library of Congress.

<sup>4</sup> U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Negro Aviators, Bulletin No. 3 (January 1939).

<sup>5</sup> Ulysses Lee, The Employment of Negro Troops, United States Army in World War II: Special Studies (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, United States Army, 1966), p. 55.

<sup>6</sup> Charles A. Lindbergh, "Aviation, Geography, and Race," Reader's Digest 35 (November 1939):64.

<sup>7</sup> Kenneth Brown Collings, "America Will Never Fly," American Mercury 38 (July 1936):292. For rebuttals to Collings' assertion, by George S. Schuyler and William J. Powell, see American Mercury 39 (December 1936):xxvii-xxx and 41 (May 1937):127.

<sup>8</sup> U.S., Congress, House of Representatives, Second Supplemental National Defense Appropriation Bill for 1941: Hearings before the Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations . . ., 76th Cong., 3rd Sess., 1940, pp. 132-33; U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Negro Aviators, Negro Statistical Bulletin No. 3 (September 1940). For the response of the black press to General Marshall's statement, see Pittsburgh Courier (nat. ed.), 17 August 1940, pp. 1, 4.

<sup>9</sup> In recent years popular interest in black aviation history has been growing, stimulated largely by the opening of the National Air and Space Museum's exhibit "Black Wings: The American Black in Aviation" in September 1982 and the publication of a booklet based on the exhibit: Von Hardesty and Dominick Pisano, Black Wings: The American Black in Aviation (Washington, D.C.: National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution, 1983). For a more

recent effort at recounting the activities of pre-World War II black fliers, see Philip S. Hart's documentary film Flyers in Search of A Dream (Boston: WGBH Educational Foundation, 1986), broadcast nationally over the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) in February 1987.

<sup>10</sup> See Joel Rogers' syndicated feature "Your History" in Pittsburgh Courier (nat. ed.), 6 May 1944, p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> George Edward Barbour, "Early Black Flyers of Western Pennsylvania, 1906-1945," Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine 69 (April 1986):95-97.

<sup>12</sup> Henry E. Baker, "The Negro in the Field of Invention," Journal of Negro History 2 (January 1917):34; Carter G. Woodson and Charles H. Wesley, The Negro in Our History, 12th ed., rev. and enl. (Washington, D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1972), p. 464; U.S. Patent Office, Official Gazette 90 (20 February 1900):1506.

<sup>13</sup> Christian Recorder, 21 Jan 1911 in Tuskegee Clippings File, 242:671.

<sup>14</sup> Marshall, b. ca. 1885, was originally from Macon, Georgia; he died suddenly of appendicitis in 1916. Crisis 4 (September 1912):223; Southern Workman (August 1916) in Tuskegee Clippings File, 242:680; and U.S. Patent Office, Official Gazette 182 (10 September 1912):365.

<sup>15</sup> Baker, "The Negro in the Field of Invention," p. 34; Woodson and Wesley, The Negro in Our History, p. 464; U.S. Patent Office, Official Gazette 185 (December 1912):487. Madison, a graduate of Tuskegee Institute, apparently gave up his dreams of designing an airplane and became a plumbing engineer; in 1931 he patented a radiator bracket for which he received a lucrative U.S. Army contract in 1942; Pittsburgh Courier (nat. ed.), 21 February 1942, p. 19.

<sup>16</sup> Baker, "The Negro in the Field of Invention," p. 34; Woodson and Wesley, The Negro in Our History, p. 464; U.S. Patent Office, Official Gazette 185 (17 December 1912):692; James de T. Abajian, comp., Blacks in Selected Newspapers, Censuses, and Other Sources: An Index to Names and Subjects, 3 vols. (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1977), 3:352 citing Oakland Sunshine, 20 December 1913 and Western Review, June 1915.

<sup>17</sup> Baker, "The Negro in the Field of Invention," p. 34, gives the name as J. E. Whooter of Missouri; Woodson and Wesley, The Negro in Our History, p. 464, reports the name as H. E. Hooter of Missouri. Neither name appears in the "Alphabetical list of patentees," U.S. Patent Office, Annual Report for the Commissioner of Patents for the Year 1914 (Wash., D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1915) but a John E. McWhorter of St. Louis appears in the "Alphabetical list of inventions" as the inventor of an "aeroplane;" see U.S. Patent Office, Official Gazette, 208 (3 November 1914):84.

<sup>18</sup> Hayden, whose name also appears as Lucian Headin and L. Arthur Headen, reportedly went abroad to market his device after the United States government refused to adopt it; he was supposedly commissioned a second lieutenant in the



Royal Flying Corps after Great Britain adopted the device. New York Age, 18 January 1912 (with photo of Hayden at controls of an aircraft) in Tuskegee Clippings File, 242:672-73 and Des Moines Iowa State Bystander, 16 February 1912, p. 2 (reported in both as Lucian Headin); Des Moines Iowa State Bystander, 28 February 1913, p. 3 (reported as L. Arthur Headin); and New York Age, 27 April 1918 and Raleigh Independent, 4 May 1918 in Tuskegee Clippings File, 242:689 (reported as L. A. Hayden). Hayden's name (in any of its various spellings) does not appear in the "Alphabetical list of patentees" of the Commissioner of Patents Annual Reports for the years 1910 through 1918, nor is there any entry for an aeronautical "stabilizer" or "equalizer," the reported name of Hayden's invention, in the "Alphabetical list of inventions" for those years.

<sup>19</sup>Barbour, "Early Black Flyers," p. 97.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 97-98.

<sup>21</sup>Atlanta Independent, 28 October 1911, p. 11.

<sup>22</sup>Barbour, "Early Black Flyers," 98; Elizabeth Ross Haynes, The Black Boy of Atlanta: A Biography of Richard Robert Wright, Sr. (Boston: House of Edinboro, 1952), p. 81.

<sup>23</sup>Des Moines (Iowa) Bystander, 22 June 1917, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup>Lee, Employment of Negro Troops, p. 55.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*; Charles H. Williams, Negro Soldiers in World War I: The Human Side, with an intro. by Benjamin Brawley (New York: AMS Press, 1970; reprint of 1923 ed. pub. under title Sidelights on Negro Soldiers), p. 53; Arthur E. Barbeau and Florette Henri, The Unknown Soldiers: Black American Troops in World War I (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), p. 63.

<sup>26</sup>Bullard was not as some sources claim, a member of the Lafayette Escadrille, the French unit officially known as Spad Squadron 124 and manned exclusively by some twenty-five American volunteers. He was, instead, part of the Lafayette Flying Corps, a designation that applies to all of the roughly two hundred Americans who flew with the French, most of whom, like Bullard, were scattered in various squadrons throughout the French Air Service. See Philip M. Flammer, The Vivid Air: The Lafayette Escadrille (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1981), p. x and *passim*.

<sup>27</sup>P. J. Carisella and James W. Ryan, The Black Swallow of Death: The Incredible Story of Eugene Jacques Bullard, the World's First Black Combat Aviator (Boston: Marlborough House, 1972); James Norman Hall and Charles Bernard Nordhoff, eds., The Lafayette Flying Corps, 2 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1920), 1:151; Walt Brown, Jr., ed., An American for Lafayette: The Diaries of E. C. C. Genet, Lafayette Escadrille with an Introduction by Dale L. Walker (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1981), pp. 99-100; Flammer, The Vivid Air, p. 3; and Bernard C. Nalty, Strength For the Fight: A

History of Black Americans in the Military (New York: The Free Press, 1986), p. 124.

<sup>28</sup>Bricktop, Bricktop with James Haskins (New York: Atheneum, 1983), pp. 82, 84-88, 118-19, 145, 167, 203. The only black known to have publicly acknowledged Bullard's wartime flying record during the inter-war years was George S. Schuyler in his rebuttal to Kenneth Brown Collings, American Mercury 39 (December 1936): xxviii-xxx. In September 1941 Bullard wrote the president of Tuskegee Institute, F. D. Patterson, and the executive secretary of the NAACP, Walter White, asking for their assistance in recruiting American blacks for Free French flying forces but there is no indication that either recognized Bullard's unique status as the only American black with a confirmed aerial victory to his credit. See Bullard to White, 6 September 1941, Group II, Series A, Box 647, U.S. Army Air Corps, General Folder, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress; Bullard to Patterson, 10 September 1941 and n.d., Patterson to Bullard, 16 September 1941, in Bro-By Folder, General Correspondence 1941, F. D. Patterson Papers, Tuskegee University Archives, Tuskegee, Alabama.

<sup>29</sup>Elois Patterson, Memoirs of the Late Bessie Coleman, Aviatrix: Pioneer of the Negro People in Aviation (n.p., 1969); Kathleen L. Brooks-Pazmany, United States Women in Aviation, 1919-1929 (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1983), p. 8; Marianna W. Davis, ed., Contributions of Black Women to America, 2 vols. (Columbia, S.C.: Kenday Press, 1982), pp. 497-98; David Young and Neal Callahan, Fill the Heavens with Commerce: Chicago Aviation, 1855-1926 (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 1981), p. 156. Some sources maintain that Coleman was the first black, man or woman, to earn a flying license; if, however, the reports of Lucian Arthur Hayden earning a license in France by 1913 are accurate (see above), then Coleman would be the second black and the first black woman licensed to fly.

<sup>30</sup>There are two book-length works on Julian, both of which should be used with caution: Colonel Hubert Julian, as told to John Bulloch, Black Eagle (London: The Adventurers Club, 1965) and John Peer Nugent, The Black Eagle (New York: Stein and Day, 1971). More reliable are William Randolph Scott, "Hubert F. Julian: The Black Eagle of Harlem," Chapter 7 in "A Study of Afro-American and Ethiopian Relations, 1896-1941" (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1971), pp. 217-48; Robert A. Hill, Emory J. Tolbert, and Deborah Forczek, eds., The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Volume IV, 1 September 1921-2 September 1922 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 1059-60, n. 1; and Robert G. Weisbord, "Black America and the Italian-Ethiopian Crisis: An Episode in Pan-Negroism," Historian 34 (February 1972): 230-241.

<sup>31</sup>Crisis 22 (October 1921):273; Richmond (Va.) Planet, 6 August 1921 in Tuskegee Clippings File, 242:700. The accuracy of the title "Dr." and Julian's status as a student at McGill University have not been confirmed but are likely apocryphal, based on later biographical sketches. Julian did receive a patent for his safety device; see U.S. Patent Office, Official Gazette, 286 (24 May 1921):732. The offers from the Curtiss and Gerni companies are unconfirmed.

- <sup>32</sup> Julian, Black Eagle, p. 36.
- <sup>33</sup> John Hope Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans, 5th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), pp. 354-56.
- <sup>34</sup> Marcus Garvey Papers, 4:1048-49, 1059-60; Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom, p. 355; Theodore Draper, The Rediscovery of Black Nationalism (New York: Viking Press, 1970), p. 51.
- <sup>35</sup> Nugent, Black Eagle, pp. 40-47; Julian, Black Eagle, pp. 58-65; Marcus Garvey Papers, 4:1060.
- <sup>36</sup> Nugent, Black Eagle, pp. 48-50; Julian, Black Eagle, pp. 70-71.
- <sup>37</sup> Nugent, Black Eagle, p. 63.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 121-22.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. 53-127; Julian, Black Eagle, pp. 81-135.
- <sup>40</sup> Reprinted in Crisis 43 (March 1936):83.
- <sup>41</sup> Pittsburgh Courier (nat. ed.), 25 June 1927, sec. 2, p. 1.
- <sup>42</sup> Charles A. Lindbergh, "We": The Famous Flier's Own Story of His Life and Transatlantic Flight, together with His Views on the Future of Aviation (New York: Grosset and Dunlop, 1927), pp. 54-60.
- <sup>43</sup> Herbert R. Northrup, Armand J. Thieblot, Jr., and William N. Chernish, The Negro in the Air Transport Industry, The Racial Policies of American Industry, Report No. 23 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), p. 28.
- <sup>44</sup> Foreman subsequently announced that he would open a flying school in Los Angeles and then disappeared from public view. Pittsburgh Courier (nat. ed.), 12 March 1927, p. 1 and 17 September 1927, p. 5; Chicago Bee, 4 June 1927 in Tuskegee Clippings File, 30:466; and William J. Powell, Black Wings (Los Angeles: Ivan Deach, Jr., 1934), pp. 53-55.
- <sup>45</sup> Opportunity 5 (July 1927):216.
- <sup>46</sup> Pittsburgh Courier (nat. ed.), 16 July 1927, p. 5.
- <sup>47</sup> New York Times, 4 August 1927, p. 14.
- <sup>48</sup> Pittsburgh Courier (nat. ed.), 22 October 1927, pp. 1, 5.
- <sup>49</sup> Crisis 43 (June 1936):189-90.

<sup>50</sup> Abajian, Blacks in Selected Newspapers, 1:82, citing the Los Angeles News Age, 24 June 1921, p. 1.

<sup>51</sup> Nugent, Black Eagle, pp. 51-52. The similarity of the name of Julian's organization to that of the NAACP may not have been coincidental; several years earlier Julian was reportedly rebuffed by NAACP executive secretary James Weldon Johnson when he sought the organization's support for his transatlantic flight attempts. Weldon's excuse that the NAACP concentrated on attacking racism and discrimination in court proceedings prompted Julian to suggest that a more appropriate name for the organization might be "[National] Association for the Defence of Colored People." Julian, Black Eagle, pp. 68-69.

<sup>52</sup> Opportunity 7 (November 1929):353; Crisis 35 (September 1928):304, 306.

<sup>53</sup> Only one extant copy of Bessie Coleman Aero News has been located, Volume 1, Number 1 (May 1930), held by the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, D.C.

<sup>54</sup> Powell, Black Wings, pp. 1-95; Bessie Coleman Aero News 1 (May 1930):13. Banning earned his license only a year after the establishment of the Bureau of Air Commerce, the federal agency empowered to issue pilots licenses; prior to 1926 the only licenses issued in the United States were at the state level.

<sup>55</sup> Bessie Coleman Aero News 1 (May 1930):6, 21; Des Moines, Iowa Bystander, 12 October 1929, p. 1.

<sup>56</sup> Bessie Coleman Aero News 1 (May 1930):5.

<sup>57</sup> Northrup, The Negro in the Air Transport Industry, p. 28

<sup>58</sup> George E. Hopkins, The Airline Pilots: A Study in Elite Unionization (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 71.

<sup>59</sup> Chicago Defender (nat. ed.), 11 April 1936, p. 2.

<sup>60</sup> The Challenger Air Pilot Association was known briefly as the Challenger Aero Club. Chicago Defender, 30 May 1936, p. 5.

<sup>61</sup> Newsweek, 29 September 1934, p. 36.

<sup>62</sup> Powell, Black Wings, p. 87.

<sup>63</sup> East Tennessee News, 13 June 1935 in Tuskegee Clippings File, 48:998.

<sup>64</sup> See, for example, Chicago Defender (nat. ed.) 28 March 1936, p. 3, 9 May 1936, p. 12; Pittsburgh Courier (nat. ed.), 30 January 1937, p. 10. Bessie Coleman has remained a compelling figure in black history; see, for example, J. Goodrich, "Salute to Bessie Coleman," Negro Digest 8 (May 1950):82-83; Anita King, "Brave Bessie: First Black Pilot," Essence 7 (May 1976):36; "They Take to the Sky: Group of Midwest women follow path blazed by Bessie Coleman," Ebony,

May 1977, pp. 88-96; and "Drive Launched to Honor Coleman with [U.S. Postal] Stamp," Chicago Defender, 5 May 1986, p. 13.

<sup>65</sup> Pittsburgh Courier (nat. ed.), 16 May 1931, p. 10. At least two readers responded to "Call of the Wings." Ed Sanders of New Orleans proposed the establishment of a "National Aviation Fund," chaired by Tuskegee President R. Moton, to support flying training among blacks. John W. Greene, Jr., of Boston called Levette's verses "horribly inaccurate," explaining that the real problem was not fear of flying but the high cost of flight instruction and the refusal of the Army and Navy to accept blacks as aviation cadets. *Ibid.*, 6 June 1931, sec. 2, p. 2.

<sup>66</sup> Lonnie G. Bunche, III, "In Search of a Dream: The Flight of Herman Banning and Thomas Allen," Journal of American Culture 7 (Spring/Summer 1984):100-103. For a more critical account see Powell, Black Wings, pp. 155-77.

<sup>67</sup> Crisis 40 (April 1933): 92; Powell, Black Wings, p. 176.

<sup>68</sup> Newsweek, 29 September 1934, p. 35; Oral History Interview of C. Alfred "Chief" Anderson by James C. Hasdorff, 8-9 June 1981, typed transcript (120 pp.), p. 27, K239.0512-1272, in United States Air Force Collection, United States Air Force Historical Research Center, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama (hereafter cited as Anderson Interview).

<sup>69</sup> Anderson Interview, p. 28.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-6, 14, 25.

<sup>72</sup> Hardesty and Pisano, Black Wings, p. 16; Anderson Interview, pp. 22-23, 28-34. Anderson and Forsythe were the first blacks to complete a round-trip transcontinental flight. Although Banning and Allen completed the first one-way transcontinental flight by black Americans in October 1932, Anderson and Forsythe are frequently credited their accomplishment; see, for example, Harry A. Ploski and Warren Marr, comps. and eds., The Negro Almanac: A Reference Work on the Afro-American, 3rd ed. (New York: Bellwether, 1976), "Black Firsts," pp. 1044. Very little research has been published on either the Banning-Allen team or the Forsythe-Anderson partnership, and what has is based almost exclusively on newspaper accounts; see, for example, Corn, Winged Gospel, pp. 59-60 and Bunche, "In Search of a Dream." Two extremely useful sources on the Forsythe-Anderson flights are the Inter-racial Aviation Goodwill (IGAC) Folder, General Correspondence Box 191, in the Robert Russa Moton Papers, Tuskegee University Archives; and the Anderson Interview.

<sup>73</sup> Pittsburgh Courier (nat. ed.), 1 July 1933, p. 2; Des Moines, Iowa Bystander, 21 July 1933, p. 1, 28 July 1933, p. 1, and 4 August 1933, p. 1; Mary J. Washington, "A Race Soars Upward," Opportunity 12 (October 1934):300.

<sup>74</sup>Washington, "A Race Soars Upward," Opportunity 12 (October 1934):300. In 1929 William J. Powell and James Herman Banning inadvertently landed in Mexico through a navigational error and became the first American blacks to fly across international borders, albeit unintentionally. See Powell, Black Wings, pp. 115-35; Des Moines Iowa Bystander, 16 November 1929, p. 1.

<sup>75</sup>Official Program: Christening of the Booker T. Washington and Our Race Soars Upward: The Pan American Goodwill Flight Outlined, pamphlets in IGAC Folder, GC Box 191, Moton Papers, TUA. The Anderson-Forsythe flight was not the first "Pan American Goodwill Flight;" in 1926-27 the U.S. Army completed an air tour of South America also known as the "Pan American Goodwill Flight."

<sup>76</sup>Montgomery Advertiser, 14 September 1934, p. 16; Tuskegee Messenger 10 (October 1934):1, 8; Official Program: Christening of the Booker T. Washington, IGAC Folder, GC Box 191, Moton Papers, TUA.

<sup>77</sup>For full information on fund raising by the campus community and the efforts of Ines in support of Forsythe and Anderson, see correspondence in IGAC Folder, GC Box 191, Moton Papers, TUA.

<sup>78</sup>The sketch of the Pan-American Goodwill Flight is based on reports in the New York Times, the Pittsburgh Courier (National Edition), the December 1934 Tuskegee Messenger, and the Anderson Interview, pp. 35-45. Reports of the flight in the New York Times can be found in the following issues: 8 November 1934, p. 20; 10 November 1934, p. 17; 11 November 1934, p. 29; 13 November 1934, p. 10; 9 December 1934, p. 25; 12 December 1934, p. 16; 14 December 1934, p. 11; and 15 December 1934, p. 6. Reports in the Pittsburgh Courier can be found in the following issues: 10 November 1934, p. 1; 17 November 1934, p. 1; 24 November 1934, p. 2; and 22 December 1934, p. 1.

<sup>79</sup>Anderson subsequently became pilot for Richard Robert Wright, Sr., the organizer of the Georgia State Colored Fair who had attempted to bring one of the first black fliers to the event in 1911 (see above). By the late 1930s Wright had moved to Philadelphia and was a successful banker; see Haynes, Black Boy of Atlanta, pp. 157-58. Forsythe continued his aeronautical proselytizing; see, for example, his article "The Outlook for the Negro in Aviation," Tuskegee Messenger 11 (October 1935):7.

<sup>80</sup>See, for example, Newsweek, 29 September 1934, p. 35 and New York Times, 8 November 1934, p. 20; 10 November 1934, p. 17; 11 November 1934, p. 29; 13 November 1934, p. 10; 9 December 1934, p. 25; 12 December 1934, p. 16; 14 December 1934, p. 11; and 15 December 1934, p. 6.

<sup>81</sup>William Randolph Scott, "A Study of Afro-American and Ethiopian Relations, 1896-1941" pp. 29-30.

<sup>82</sup>Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom, pp. 422-23.

<sup>83</sup>Bayen to Barnett, 3 January 1935, Barnett to Bayen, 8 January 1934 [i.e. 1935], Box 170, Folder 9, Claude A. Barnett Papers, Chicago Historical Society (hereafter cited as CHS).

<sup>84</sup>William Randolph Scott, "Colonel John C. Robinson: The Condor of Ethiopia," Pan-African Journal 5 (Spring 1972):61-62; Bayen to Barnett, 6 May 1935, Robinson to Barnett, 3 June and 28 November 1935 Box 170, Folder 9, Barnett Papers, CHS.

<sup>85</sup>Scott, "Colonel John C. Robinson," pp. 62-63. Robinson was also serving as a correspondent for the Associated Negro Press, writing under the the name of Wilson James; see Barnett to E. G. Roberts, 17 July 1935, Box 170, Folder 9, Barnett Papers, CHS.

<sup>86</sup>Barnett to Robinson, 19 October 1935, Box 170, Folder 9, Barnett Papers, CHS.

<sup>87</sup>Scott, "A Study of Afro-American and Ethiopian Relations, 1896-1941," pp. 217-48; Weisbord, "Black America and the Italian-Ethiopian Crisis," pp. 235-36.

<sup>88</sup>Joe Louis, Joe Louis: My Life (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Javonovich, 1978), p. 48.

<sup>89</sup>Campus Digest: The Voice of the Tuskegee Student, 28 September 1935.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 12 October 1935, p. 1 and 26 October 1935, p. 1.

<sup>91</sup>Scott, "Colonel John C. Robinson," pp. 62-63.

<sup>92</sup>On at least one courier mission Robinson was attacked by Italian fighters; he managed to evade his attackers and delivered his messages safely to Addis Ababa; see Robinson to Barnett, 21 November 1935, Box 170, Folder 9, Barnett Papers, CHS.

<sup>93</sup>Scott, "Colonel John C. Robinson," p. 64; Barnett to Robinson, 22 April 1936, Box 170, Folder 9, Barnett Papers, CHS.

<sup>94</sup>New York Times, 24 May 1936, p. 3.

<sup>95</sup>Barnett to James Edmund Boyack, 28 May 1936, Box 170, Folder 9, Barnett Papers, CHS. Although the Chicago Defender, 30 May 1936, estimated the crowds at the airport and the Grand Hotel to be 5,000 and 20,000 respectively, Barnett's more conservative estimates of 3,000 and 8,000, which he conveyed privately to Boyack in the correspondence cited above, are probably more accurate.

<sup>96</sup>Chicago Defender, 30 May 1936, pp. 1-2; quotation from p. 1. See also Scott, "Colonel John C. Robinson," pp. 64-65.

<sup>97</sup> See, for example, New York Times, 18 May 1936, p. 11; St. Louis Argus, 29 May 1936 in Tuskegee Clippings File, 51:901; Chicago Defender (nat. ed.), 23 May 1936, p. 1.

<sup>98</sup> Tuskegee Messenger, June 1934, p. 11; Chicago Defender (nat. ed.), 26 May 1934, p. 1, 2 June 1934, p. 2, and 9 May 1936, p. 12.

<sup>99</sup> Robinson to Claude A. Barnett, 28 November 1935; Barnett to Robinson, 31 December 1935, 22 January 1936, 16 April 1936; in Box 170, Folder 9, Barnett Papers, CHS.

<sup>100</sup> Baltimore Afro-American, 29 August 1936 in Tuskegee Clippings File 52:366; Pittsburgh Courier, 3 October 1936 in ibid., 51:896; G. L. Washington, Director of Mechanical Industries, Tuskegee Institute to Robinson, 7 July 1936, LC 1936, Patterson Papers, TUA.

<sup>101</sup> Craftsmen Aero News 1 (January 1937):3-5; Claude A. Barnett to F. D. Patterson, with undated press release attached, 7 May 1936, Barnett Correspondence, 1936-42, LC 1937, Patterson Papers, TUA; Opportunity 15 (May 1937):156.

<sup>102</sup> Enoch P. Waters, American Diary: A Personal History of the Black Press (Chicago: Path Press, 1987), pp. 196-97, 202.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 195.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., pp. 196-97.

<sup>105</sup> Chauncey E. Spencer, Who is Chauncey Spencer? (Detroit: Broadside Press, 1975), p. 140.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 140; Waters, American Diary, p. 201. For a reprinted copy of the NAAA certificate of incorporation, dated 16 August 1939, see Spencer, Who is Chauncey Spencer, pp. 148-49; the year 1939 on the reprint of the certificate may be a printing error--Waters cites 1937 as the year the state charter was granted and Spencer's narrative seems to confirm Waters' account. Concurrently with the formation of the NAAA, Coffey, Brown, and Waters established and obtained a state charter for a flying school under the name Coffey School of Aeronautics; Waters, American Diary, p. 204.

<sup>107</sup> Waters, American Diary, p. 204.

<sup>108</sup> Chicago Defender, 12 May 1934, p. 12.

<sup>109</sup> Hardesty and Pisano, Black Wings, pp. 4-5; Pittsburgh Courier, 21 May 1938 in Tuskegee Clippings File 57:382.

<sup>110</sup> Chicago Defender, 28 May 1938 in Tuskegee Clippings File 57:382.



<sup>111</sup>Franklin D. Roosevelt, The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt: 1939 Volume, War--and Neutrality, vol. 8 (London: Macmillan, 1941), pp. 71-72.

<sup>112</sup>Public Law 18, Statutes at Large, 53:555-60 (1939); Civilian Pilot Training Act, Statutes at Large, 53:855-56 (1939).

<sup>113</sup>"Legislation Relating to the Army Air Forces Training Program, 1939-1945," rev. ed., Army Air Forces Historical Studies: No. 7 (Headquarters, Army Air Forces, April 1946), p. 20, United States Air Force Historical Research Center, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama (hereafter USAFHRC) #101-7B.

<sup>114</sup>Public Law 18, Statutes at Large, 53:556 (1939).

<sup>115</sup>U.S., Congress, Senate, Committee on Military Affairs, National Defense: Hearings before the Committee on Military Affairs, United States Senate on H.R. 3791, 76th Cong., 1st sess., 1939, pp. 311-16.

<sup>116</sup>Lee, Employment of Negro Troops, p. 57.

<sup>117</sup>Dominick A. Pisano, "A Brief History of the Civilian Pilot Training Program, 1939-1944," National Air and Space Museum Research Report: 1986 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1986), pp. 25, 30.

<sup>118</sup>Congressional Record, 76th Cong., 1st Sess. (19 April 1939), p. 4490.

<sup>119</sup>Waters, American Diary, pp. 205-207; Spencer, Who Is Chauncey Spencer?, pp. 31-35, 140-44.

<sup>120</sup>Spencer, Who Is Chauncey Spencer?, p. 34.

<sup>121</sup>Civilian Pilot Training Act, Statutes at Large, 53:856 (1939).

<sup>122</sup>Pisano, "A Brief History of the Civilian Pilot Training Program, 1939-1944," p. 30.

<sup>123</sup>Lee, Employment of Negro Troops, pp. 59-62.

<sup>124</sup>The microfilm edition of the Tuskegee Clippings File is a convenient source for documenting the interest of the black press in the CPT Program during the pre-war years; see the entries under "Aviation" for 1939 (60:598-644) and 1940 (65:385-430).

<sup>125</sup>Lee, Employment of Negro Troops, pp. 116-17.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid., pp. 118-19.

<sup>127</sup>1st Lt. Leo L. Kerford, Public Relations Officer, Tuskegee Army Air Field to Marcus M. Ray, Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War, with enclosure, 10 June 1946; Subject Files, 1940-1947; Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War; Office of the Assistant Secretary of War; Records of the Secretary of War, Record Group 107, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<sup>128</sup>E. Franklin Frazier, Negro Youth at the Crossways: Their Personality Development in the Middle States (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1940), pp. 165-66.

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